THROUGH EDUCATION TO INDEPENDENCE

or

HOW SHOULD THE BLIND BE EDUCATED AND FITTED FOR ACTIVE LIFE

by

Michael Anagnos

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[Reprinted from the sixty-eighth annual report of the Perkins Institution and Massachusetts School for the Blind.]

BOSTON

GEORGE H. ELLIS, PRINTER, 272 CONGRESS STREET

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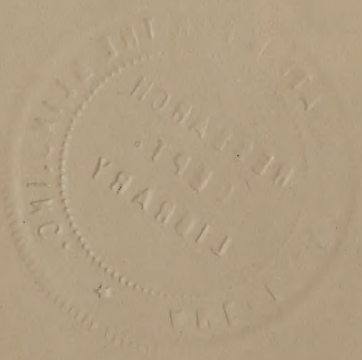

THROUGH EDUCATION TO INDEPENDENCE.

His tongue was framed to music,
And his hand was armed with skill;
His face was the mould of beauty,
And his heart the throne of will.
— EMERSON.

When Ajax was surrounded with dense darkness and could not discern his enemies and smite them, his most fervent supplication to the gods was for light and for nothing more. This he deemed amply sufficient for the accomplishment of his bellicose purpose. "Give me to see," was his piteous cry, "and I ask no more."

Ποίησον δ'αἴθρην, δὸς δ'ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ἰδέσθαι.

The blind in these days are as eager in their petitions for light to enable them to surmount all obstacles in the pathway of their advancement and to fight the battle of life successfully, as Ajax was; but the illumination for which they plead passionately differs in character from that for which he begged. They do not ask for impossible things, for changes in the laws of nature, which nothing short of a veritable miracle can effect. They stand on the positive point of the magnet, and, being aware that the sullen cloud of never-ending night which envelops them is indissoluble, they do not consume their ener-

gies in useless implorations for its dissipation. They know that, when the mechanism of the eyes is destroyed or hopelessly impaired, the power of vision is irrevocably gone from them, and they do not "batter the gates of heaven with storms of prayer" for its restoration. Instead of feeding on illusive hopes and of giving way to nebulous desires and unrealizable longings they yearn for that which it is perfectly possible to give them, for what indeed is their birthright,—for a broad and liberal education, which in their case is a real source of intellectual, moral and spiritual enlightenment, and which alone can release them from the bondage of dependence and link their lives to a dynamic power able to lift them to the highest levels of usefulness and happiness.

In the advanced civilization of our era the imperfectly taught and insufficiently trained blind persons are at a greater disadvantage than ever before. In this country, as well as in Europe, the old order of things has been fast disappearing of late years and a new state of affairs has been taking its place. A momentous crisis is confronting us. Manual labor is steadily decreasing in value and has in many instances ceased to be remunerative on account of the extensive employment of machinery in almost every department of human activity. The wide spread of knowledge of every kind and the rapid increase of general intelligence, the stupendous progress made in the development and utilization of the physical sciences, the marvellous success of the unremitting efforts to harness the forces of nature and to subjugate them to the service of man, the universal tendency to effect gigantic consolidations of manufacturing and commercial enterprises and to concentrate capital and control prices, accompanied by the finan-

cial and political consequences that follow in the train of such concentration, the steady propagation of the spirit of democracy and the wonderful feats which are constantly accomplished in the domain of invention, all these combined together have transmuted thought and have brought about a social transformation and an industrial revolution, which have changed most of the adjustments of the past and of the relations of life, have created new conditions and requirements, and have given rise to various occupations and numerous combinations in business. Indeed, economic arrangements are incessantly shifting from their old foundations and the scientific evolution of human society is the order of the day.

Owing to their great dependence upon simple manual occupations and mechanical arts for self-support, it is evident that the blind are more seriously affected by these radical changes and developments than any other class of people, and that the problems, which in their case press for solution, are very grave and of momentous significance.

In view of this state of things the chief duty of our school is to take into account the demands and exigencies of the times and to bring its pupils into harmonious relations with their environment, physical and social, as well as intellectual and moral. We must leave behind the past, which is "but the dim shadow of humanity thrown backward by the eternal sunlight," and look steadfastly into the illimitable future, which stretches before us and which is in some degree to be moulded by our own efforts. We must follow the light of progress and break the shackles of tradition and prejudice which hinder the blind from becoming fitted to make the best of themselves and which narrow their sphere of usefulness

and helpfulness. We must enable them to keep open their communication with the base of supplies while they are fighting the battle of self-maintenance. We must secure for them the means for a broader intellectual foundation, a greater development of the inner forces of thought, feeling and action, a more extensive and thorough training in the practical affairs of life, a deeper appreciation of the sacredness of all moral and legal obligations, and last but not least a greater power of self-reliance and self-direction, which will save them from being tossed "helpless on fate's torrent as a straw."

> Man is his own star; and the soul that can
> Render an honest and a perfect man
> Commands all light, all influence, all fate.

The spirit of true philanthropy and fraternal kindness is prevailing to a degree never reached before, and there is no danger that the blind will be neglected and left unassisted in their efforts for independent, manly and womanly self-support. One of the most hopeful signs of their condition appears in their disposition and eager desire to go forward and seek the proper ways and means for rising above the clouds of their infirmity, as well as in their ardent wish to learn to rely upon their own exertions so far as possible. There are not a few among them, who, instead of clinging in timid helplessness to a seeing leader, or letting themselves sink in the waves of dependence and misery, are striking out and learning to swim across the river of misfortune. They feel the need of a life preserver. If it is not best to procure one ready-made for them, let us enable them to find the needed help in their mind and muscle, in their courage and in their enterprising spirit. But let it

be distinctly understood, that we cannot provide for them the right kind of assistance by building for their benefit immense asylums and by supplying the inmates of these abodes with food and shelter. This sort of aid will prove injurious rather than beneficial.

Every measure of relief which operates to weaken the motives for self-help and the sense of dignity must be condemned and avoided as fostering the degrading habits of indolence and idleness, as paving the way to gentle beggary and as tending to block the road to permanent improvement. The blind must not be made parasites clinging to the tree of dependence, nor satellites revolving around the charitable organizations of special poor-houses, the real character of which is thinly disguised under the plausible name of "working homes." It is not by dispensing charity to them or by smoothing their pathway of life with the pavement of alms, but by clarifying their mental and moral vision and by stimulating their power of independent thought and enlarging their sources of self-help, that we may render them active and productive members of society and not passive and idle consumers. Assistance given to them in any form which tends to enfeeble the moral fibre, to paralyze every motive of self-reliance and to remove all incentives to activity is both unwise and harmful and proves a curse rather than a blessing to the recipients.

How to train the blind and equip them adequately for the active duties and occupations of life, preparing thereby their way to self-maintenance and independence, has always been and still continues to be one of the most serious of all the problems with which their educators have had to grapple.

There was a time in the early history of our schools when it was much easier and less expensive for them

to educate their pupils in a practical way and fit these thoroughly to earn their living through their own exertions. Then the industrial department was one of the prominent features of institutions for the blind, and, as it was very lucrative to work at one or more simple trades, the majority of graduates found it very wise to do so and to provide both for themselves and for those who depended upon them. But now all this is a thing of the past. The mechanical or technical pursuits in which persons bereft of the visual sense can profitably engage are very few in number. Their circle, although limited already, is becoming smaller every year, and all the eager efforts that have been put forth to enlarge it have proved futile.

Most of the institutions for the blind in America have tried the experiment of introducing one trade after another with a view of securing gainful employment for their graduates and apprentices, but without avail. Such industries as seemed to give promise of fair profit have in turn been taken up only to be dropped after a few years' experience as inadequate and unprofitable.

Thus every attempt to utilize various mechanical arts and render them reliable sources of income, even to a limited number of men and women of average ability, has failed. That broom-making, or seating cane-bottomed chairs, or mattress-making, or upholstery and willow work are still carried on in some places with a small gain or without great loss furnishes no solid proof of the value of any of these occupations and no strong argument in favor of their continuance. A careful study of the matter shows, that in every instance of unquestionable success the result is wholly due either to the superior skill and natural business cleverness of an individual or to

special local advantages and peculiarly helpful circumstances. Those who are free from the bias of selfish motives and able to take a broad outlook over the general field of the employments of the blind cannot but see that so far as industrial pursuits are concerned the prospects are far from being encouraging. Indeed, on account of the division or specialization of labor and the universal use of machinery which cannot be safely handled without the guidance of the sense of sight, it is simply a question of time when those who are deprived of this faculty will cease to travel the road of mechanical trades in competition with ordinary workmen. In the natural course of things this is inevitable, and sooner or later it will come to pass. It cannot be otherwise.

Now in the face of these facts what is our duty towards our pupils? In making plans or devising methods what principles shall we adopt or what rules shall we follow? Are we to take no notice of the signs of the times and of the warnings of experience? Shall we venture to set sail against the strong current of forces which are at work shaping human activities and giving direction to business enterprises? Instead of holding fast to what is right in principle and promises in practice to level the great mass of sightless people up to a higher plane both socially and morally, shall we yield to the idle clamor of boisterous selfishness and sacrifice the interests and welfare of the many to the convenience and satisfaction of the few by temporizing and putting the easy devices of expediency in place of the sterner requirements of justice and wisdom and science and common sense? Is it prudent, is it manly, nay, is it honest to ignore the dictates of reason and the teachings of sound philosophy and to pursue a course which would tend to

pauperize and degrade the blind and which would inevitably lead to the erection and support of special almshouses for their benefit, disguised under the false name of "working homes?" If we do not pursue this course, then what shall we do?

There is but one answer to these questions: we must change front. Unmoved by clamor and undisturbed by the demands of indolence and selfishness, we must show, in dealing with a most serious problem, uncompromising moral courage and unflagging honesty of purpose. We must consider and measure the need in all its phases and proportions and then strive to meet it fairly and in the best possible manner. The great task confronting us is not how to house and feed and pension a limited number of sightless individuals, nor how to gratify the wishes of those among them, who, aspiring to attain ease and comfort for themselves at public expense and without much exertion on their part, are indifferent as to the fatal results of their gain and indulge in such low views of life and in such perversions of their destiny as bring in their train demoralization and degradation. Our task is more serious than this. It is how to uplift the blind as a class, how to strengthen them and render them self-reliant and how to secure for them an appropriate place in the social ranks, in the esteem and the activities of the communities in which their lot may be cast. In other words, it is our solemn duty to do everything in our power which will enable those of our fellow-men who live in never-ceasing darkness to see through their mind's eyes, to think rationally, to judge correctly, to imagine sanely, to decide rightly, to plan wisely, to execute promptly, to sympathize broadly and to be prepared to conform with the demands and conditions of modern progress.

In endeavoring to accomplish this purpose first and above all we must realize the fact that the liberation of the blind from the captivity of dependence and debasement cannot be effected by means of manual labor or of any kind of handicraft. It is brain work that will do this. It is not technical skill nor ability to work successfully at one or more of the usual trades that will obliterate the most conspicuous effects and check the train of consequences of the loss of sight, or bring about the higher development of its victims and turn the current of their lives to a favorable direction. Verily, it is not this that will raise them in the scale of humanity and place them on terms of equality with their fellow-men, but broad intelligence, mental alertness, thorough acquaintance with the principles and rules that govern business, a firm and comprehensive grasp of affairs, general versatility and adaptability, and a power of discernment and penetration in all things. A comprehensive and liberal scheme of education is necessary for this purpose, one which will enable the recipients of its benefits to —

> Rise to their task, and, be it small or great,
> Shine on it till their smile has made it bright.

This system must begin with the kindergarten and end with a completely equipped high or secondary school, bringing our graduates inside of the gates of the colleges and universities of the country for seeing young men and women. It should provide not only for physical, intellectual and ethical culture, but also for training along scientific, æsthetic and humanitarian lines, and should procure for the blind, both male and female, such superior advantages as would best fit them to share in the activities of life, to enter the liberal professions, to respond to the ordinary require-

ments of business and to discharge successfully their duties and obligations to society in whatever sphere they may be placed. It is this alone that, by equipping every individual to reach out towards his highest and largest life, will help to create the best possible types of manhood and womanhood, and thus make a long step toward approaching the ideal which Emerson portrays in the lines quoted at the head of this section. Working homes cannot do this. On the contrary, their natural tendency is to hinder rather than facilitate the attainment of such an end. Instead of being practical solvents of a perplexing problem and permanent sources of good, they are merely expedients of temporary relief, pregnant with future evils of a social and moral character. They represent a system of alimony, which, born of ignorance and reared in selfishness, is wrong in principle, vicious in practice and pernicious in its effects. Loyalty to truth, devotion to the best interests of the blind and largeness of thought alike demand that we shall prevent the erection and multiplication not of workshops pure and simple but of special abodes for "lazy yawning drones," the occupants of which will have to be maintained in sheer idleness or in sham industry, and that we shall not shrink from the penalties which are inseparable from a conscientious discharge of duty. Be the consequences what they may, we must rise superior to the vociferations of the day and help to shape the destiny of the blind in accordance with the dictates of wisdom and justice and not in obedience to the demands of weakness and cowardice.

It is obvious, from what has been said in these pages, that we owe to the blind not merely an ordinary elementary "schooling" and some kind of technical training, or the opportunity of being drilled in a

mechanical occupation and facilities to exercise it advantageously, but a rounded development of character and of their best and largest capacities,— an education which will render them strong and vigorous both physically and intellectually as well as morally, will train their senses to keenness, widen their horizon of knowledge, nurture their natural aptitudes, foster their individuality, broaden their sympathies, chasten their feelings, warm their hearts by the contemplation of noble deeds, introduce them into the ethical world and into new fields of duty, instil in them a helpful spirit and enable them to attain a wide range of mental vision and a great power of thought and of varied expression, so that they may become better prepared and more fully equipped to solve the problems of life and act nobly their part in its drama when they shall enter upon the stage of practical activity. This sort of education will be for the blind a central sun of vast illuminating power, from which they may gather light and warmth and blessing.

The ultimate ideal, toward which we are striving, is briefly this: —

I. A kindergarten and primary school, possessing a sufficient endowment and amply provided with the necessary educational facilities and the best possible influences for training the little pupils in a thoroughly rational manner and for laying a firm foundation for their physical, mental, moral, social and æsthetic development.

II. A grammar and high or preparatory school, offering a classical and an English course, complete in its departments for physical and manual training, as well as for literary, scientific and musical studies, and liberally supplied with educational appliances, apparatus and musical instruments of various kinds.

Its financial status should be such as to enable it to secure the services of a strong corps of efficient and wide-awake teachers, and its curriculum should take into account the needs, the capacity, the limitations, the tastes and the special requirements of the blind, thus making provision for a thorough cultivation and discipline of all their powers, so that our graduates may be well prepared and adequately equipped to enter any of the New-England colleges and universities, or, if they cannot afford to do this, to take their places among the active and self-relying members of society.

III. A special fund, the income to be used in conferring scholarships on deserving graduates of our institution in order to enable them to avail themselves of the superior educational advantages afforded to youth of both sexes by the best colleges, universities, conservatories of music and professional or commercial schools in New England, where, in company with those who can see, the blind may pursue their studies in any branch of knowledge, in music or in the arts, sciences or professions.

It may be well for us to consider in this connection the question whether it is right and best to found and support a separate college or university for the exclusive use of the blind, or, if it is not, where their higher education should be prosecuted.

Experience, reflection and sound philosophy all lead to the conclusion, that persons suffering under a common infirmity are liable to certain unfavorable and undesirable consequences, flowing from their abnormal condition. These are undoubtedly aggravated by the close association of the sufferers in considerable numbers and for a great length of time, while they are lessened by constant intercourse with

ordinary and normal persons. The reasons for this are obvious. The loss of sight is not merely a bodily infirmity; it affects all sides of the human organism, the intellectual and moral no less than the physical. It is the unanimous opinion of all competent and candid judges, that the blind as a class incline to one or the other of two extremes of conduct. They are either very timid, meek, hesitating and dependent, or bold, egotistical, conceited and so self-assertive as to be almost impertinent. Owing to their infirmity, which tends to shut them off from the rest of the world and to turn their thoughts inward, they are very apt to think constantly of themselves and to take wrong views of things, which dwarf their lives and hinder their possibilities of growth and success. They keep their thoughts entangled ever in the low lands of selfishness and miss the glories of the hills of self-forgetfulness and of the heavens that bend over them.

These traits and various other peculiarities of a similar nature, which ensue from the extinction of the visual sense, are intensified by the practice of removing the victims of this calamity from their homes and of gathering them together in large institutions for the purpose of teaching and training them. Great and beneficent as the advantages which our pupils derive from the present system of educating them unquestionably are, we cannot but regret most profoundly the necessity which renders it imperative for us to bring under one roof a large number of sightless children and youth, setting them apart as a separate class, and which is often fraught with consequences both evil and permanent.

The ill effects of segregating the blind from their natural associations and relationships and of congre-

gating them together during the plastic and formative period of their lives are painfully apparent in their spirit of caste and clannishness, in their morbid sensitiveness, in the awkwardness of their manners and movements, in the narrow range of their sympathies, in the extremes of undue exaggeration or unreasonable depreciation of their personal worth and capacity and in various other ways.

Now, in order that we may be able to eradicate some of the most serious of these drawbacks and to reduce to the lowest possible degree the dissemination and growth of all sorts of uncouth peculiarities and oddities, we must adhere rigidly to the cardinal principles of the minimum of association of blind persons and the maximum of their commingling with those who can see.

It is beyond question that the largest possibilities of the success of this class of our fellow-men in whatever they may undertake to do depend upon their ability to enter on the arena of the competitions of life with those whom they will naturally meet in the home, the neighborhood, the social and religious assemblies and in the world of business.

For these reasons it is of the utmost importance that, as soon as our graduates are fully prepared and thoroughly fitted for a course of higher academic and scientific instruction or of training for one of the liberal professions or for a business career, they should be scattered among the ordinary institutions of learning and not gathered again into another sort of receptacle of darkness and gloom, established for the special benefit of sightless persons, which may be known by the name of colleges and universities for them. Indeed, instead of a blessing, it would be an unmitigated misfortune for the blind to be kept by

themselves for an additional period of four or five years, apart from those of their fellow-men among whom the work of their life lies. The best and most vital interests demand that they should be placed in one of the leading colleges or best professional and commercial schools, in which every state abounds, and should be thrown with seeing young men and women. They must be put in a position to compare themselves with others of their own age and to measure accurately their ability so that they may avoid the fatal error of overestimating or underrating it. They must be brought in touch with the great forces of the world, which make progress and civilization possible, and learn something of the part that each has to play in the drama of human existence. Whether they desire to devote themselves to commercial pursuits, or to become teachers, ministers, lawyers, business men or practitioners of massage, they must be educated and taught and trained side by side with those among whom they are destined to exercise their calling or vocation, and must acquire a knowledge of the practical affairs of life and of the manners, notions and usages of society. They must come in contact with the great and moving world and hear and know more of its customs and interests and shape their own mental habits and modes of thinking and motives of action more in accordance with those of the people with whom they are to live after the completion of their education.

In no institutions of learning, which may be built and maintained solely for the benefit of a class of children and youth laboring under a common physical disability, can any of these precious, practical lessons be learned. Hence the absolute necessity for funds to provide for as many scholarships as eligible candidates for higher education may require.

In order to be able to reconstruct our system of education upon a broader and more comprehensive scale and to reform the school thoroughly, giving to it feet, limbs, trunk and head,— a completely organized body,— we need immediately the three following buildings, in addition to those which we now have in use: —

Firstly.— A music hall in the parent school at South Boston, to which should be attached a sufficient number of school rooms and a commodious gymnasium for the girls. The hall should be accessible from both departments of the establishment and should have a seating capacity for an audience of six or seven hundred people.

Secondly.— A primary building for the little girls at the kindergarten at Jamaica Plain, similar to that which has been recently erected and has been occupied by the boys during the past year.

Thirdly.— The completion of the central or school building at the kindergarten, which was planned in all its details several years ago. About one-fifth part of this was built in 1893 and has been ever since used as a hall and gymnasium for both departments.

These buildings are indispensable for the enlargement, reorganization and grading of our school, and the cost of their erection and equipment will not be far from $300,000. Besides this amount an additional fund is needed, large enough to yield no less than eight thousand dollars per annum, which sum will suffice to provide scholarships and loans for all those of our graduates who are qualified to pursue a higher course of academic, musical, scientific, professional or business education, but who have no means of their own to do so.

The treasury of the institution has not a cent

that can be spared from its work and applied to any of these purposes. On the contrary, an increase of the financial resources both of the parent school and of the kindergarten will be imperative in order to cover the additional expense which the enlargement of the field of the operations of the establishment will involve. Therefore it will be absolutely necessary to make an urgent appeal to the public in order to raise the full amount of the money which is required to carry out the above-mentioned improvements.

The entire scheme of reorganization in all its details and requirements is now laid before the members of the board of trustees and the friends of the blind for their consideration and decision. I feel that there should be no hesitation or delay in taking resolute and firm hold of the matter and carrying it to a successful completion as soon as possible. The time is ripe for such action. If we put it off and wait for more propitious opportunities or for more favorable circumstances, we shall never accomplish much. We cannot afford to be dreamers and spectators, trusting to chance or to the gifts which the future may hold for us. We must make the most of the present moment and get the best out of it. We have to cross our Rubicon, be the results of our action what they may. There is no gain in tarrying longer on its bank. Retreat or advance must be made; and it remains with us either to go forward or to turn back.

So far as I am concerned, I must obey the voice of conscience and the command of duty. They urge me to undertake a task which is fraught with enormous difficulties and involves very arduous labors; but the call is so imperative that I have no option in the matter. Hence I am ready to take up this weighty charge with a deep sense of its gravity, yet with good

hope, unwavering courage and a determination to put it through. Cost what it may in hardships, in inconvenience, in anxiety and in expenditure of strength, I am bound to stand by it and to toil for it until the final victory is won. On this altar of service I am prepared to offer body and mind and heart and will — all that I am — without the remotest thought of personal emolument.

> Life is not long enough to let me work
> As I desire; but all the years will hold
> Shall I pour forth.

If, contrary to my expectations, wise heads and conservative men decide that the institution is, as it stands, well provided and adequately equipped to fulfil its mission without further improvements and expansion, and that it is not expedient to take definite and vigorous measures to procure the requisite means for reorganization within a reasonable length of time, I am determined to take my hand off the plough and to retire to private life. I cannot do otherwise. I firmly and honestly believe, that a man who has a natural taste for routine work and is satisfied to carry it on upon the lines already laid out will be far better fitted for the place than I am. For myself, I can under no circumstances help to perpetuate the present arrangements. If I should attempt for reasons of policy or of prudence or of personal comfort to suppress my convictions or to keep silent and labor in opposition to them, it would make me utterly wretched.

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> Render an honest and a perfect man
> Commands all light, all influence, all fate.

The spirit of true philanthropy and fraternal kindness is prevailing to a degree never reached before, and there is no danger that the blind will be neglected and left unassisted in their efforts for independent, manly and womanly self-support. One of the most hopeful signs of their condition appears in their disposition and eager desire to go forward and seek the proper ways and means for rising above the clouds of their infirmity, as well as in their ardent wish to learn to rely upon their own exertions so far as possible. There are not a few among them, who, instead of clinging in timid helplessness to a seeing leader, or letting themselves sink in the waves of dependence and misery, are striking out and learning to swim across the river of misfortune. They feel the need of a life preserver. If it is not best to procure one ready-made for them, let us enable them to find the needed help in their mind and muscle, in their courage and in their enterprising spirit. But let it

be distinctly understood, that we cannot provide for them the right kind of assistance by building for their benefit immense asylums and by supplying the inmates of these abodes with food and shelter. This sort of aid will prove injurious rather than beneficial.

Every measure of relief which operates to weaken the motives for self-help and the sense of dignity must be condemned and avoided as fostering the degrading habits of indolence and idleness, as paving the way to gentle beggary and as tending to block the road to permanent improvement. The blind must not be made parasites clinging to the tree of dependence, nor satellites revolving around the charitable organizations of special poor-houses, the real character of which is thinly disguised under the plausible name of "working homes." It is not by dispensing charity to them or by smoothing their pathway of life with the pavement of alms, but by clarifying their mental and moral vision and by stimulating their power of independent thought and enlarging their sources of self-help, that we may render them active and productive members of society and not passive and idle consumers. Assistance given to them in any form which tends to enfeeble the moral fibre, to paralyze every motive of self-reliance and to remove all incentives to activity is both unwise and harmful and proves a curse rather than a blessing to the recipients.

How to train the blind and equip them adequately for the active duties and occupations of life, preparing thereby their way to self-maintenance and independence, has always been and still continues to be one of the most serious of all the problems with which their educators have had to grapple.

There was a time in the early history of our schools when it was much easier and less expensive for them

to educate their pupils in a practical way and fit these thoroughly to earn their living through their own exertions. Then the industrial department was one of the prominent features of institutions for the blind, and, as it was very lucrative to work at one or more simple trades, the majority of graduates found it very wise to do so and to provide both for themselves and for those who depended upon them. But now all this is a thing of the past. The mechanical or technical pursuits in which persons bereft of the visual sense can profitably engage are very few in number. Their circle, although limited already, is becoming smaller every year, and all the eager efforts that have been put forth to enlarge it have proved futile.

Most of the institutions for the blind in America have tried the experiment of introducing one trade after another with a view of securing gainful employment for their graduates and apprentices, but without avail. Such industries as seemed to give promise of fair profit have in turn been taken up only to be dropped after a few years' experience as inadequate and unprofitable.

Thus every attempt to utilize various mechanical arts and render them reliable sources of income, even to a limited number of men and women of average ability, has failed. That broom-making, or seating cane-bottomed chairs, or mattress-making, or upholstery and willow work are still carried on in some places with a small gain or without great loss furnishes no solid proof of the value of any of these occupations and no strong argument in favor of their continuance. A careful study of the matter shows, that in every instance of unquestionable success the result is wholly due either to the superior skill and natural business cleverness of an individual or to

special local advantages and peculiarly helpful circumstances. Those who are free from the bias of selfish motives and able to take a broad outlook over the general field of the employments of the blind cannot but see that so far as industrial pursuits are concerned the prospects are far from being encouraging. Indeed, on account of the division or specialization of labor and the universal use of machinery which cannot be safely handled without the guidance of the sense of sight, it is simply a question of time when those who are deprived of this faculty will cease to travel the road of mechanical trades in competition with ordinary workmen. In the natural course of things this is inevitable, and sooner or later it will come to pass. It cannot be otherwise.

Now in the face of these facts what is our duty towards our pupils? In making plans or devising methods what principles shall we adopt or what rules shall we follow? Are we to take no notice of the signs of the times and of the warnings of experience? Shall we venture to set sail against the strong current of forces which are at work shaping human activities and giving direction to business enterprises? Instead of holding fast to what is right in principle and promises in practice to level the great mass of sightless people up to a higher plane both socially and morally, shall we yield to the idle clamor of boisterous selfishness and sacrifice the interests and welfare of the many to the convenience and satisfaction of the few by temporizing and putting the easy devices of expediency in place of the sterner requirements of justice and wisdom and science and common sense? Is it prudent, is it manly, nay, is it honest to ignore the dictates of reason and the teachings of sound philosophy and to pursue a course which would tend to

pauperize and degrade the blind and which would inevitably lead to the erection and support of special almshouses for their benefit, disguised under the false name of "working homes?" If we do not pursue this course, then what shall we do?

There is but one answer to these questions: we must change front. Unmoved by clamor and undisturbed by the demands of indolence and selfishness, we must show, in dealing with a most serious problem, uncompromising moral courage and unflagging honesty of purpose. We must consider and measure the need in all its phases and proportions and then strive to meet it fairly and in the best possible manner. The great task confronting us is not how to house and feed and pension a limited number of sightless individuals, nor how to gratify the wishes of those among them, who, aspiring to attain ease and comfort for themselves at public expense and without much exertion on their part, are indifferent as to the fatal results of their gain and indulge in such low views of life and in such perversions of their destiny as bring in their train demoralization and degradation. Our task is more serious than this. It is how to uplift the blind as a class, how to strengthen them and render them self-reliant and how to secure for them an appropriate place in the social ranks, in the esteem and the activities of the communities in which their lot may be cast. In other words, it is our solemn duty to do everything in our power which will enable those of our fellow-men who live in never-ceasing darkness to see through their mind's eyes, to think rationally, to judge correctly, to imagine sanely, to decide rightly, to plan wisely, to execute promptly, to sympathize broadly and to be prepared to conform with the demands and conditions of modern progress.

In endeavoring to accomplish this purpose first and above all we must realize the fact that the liberation of the blind from the captivity of dependence and debasement cannot be effected by means of manual labor or of any kind of handicraft. It is brain work that will do this. It is not technical skill nor ability to work successfully at one or more of the usual trades that will obliterate the most conspicuous effects and check the train of consequences of the loss of sight, or bring about the higher development of its victims and turn the current of their lives to a favorable direction. Verily, it is not this that will raise them in the scale of humanity and place them on terms of equality with their fellow-men, but broad intelligence, mental alertness, thorough acquaintance with the principles and rules that govern business, a firm and comprehensive grasp of affairs, general versatility and adaptability, and a power of discernment and penetration in all things. A comprehensive and liberal scheme of education is necessary for this purpose, one which will enable the recipients of its benefits to —

> Rise to their task, and, be it small or great,
> Shine on it till their smile has made it bright.

This system must begin with the kindergarten and end with a completely equipped high or secondary school, bringing our graduates inside of the gates of the colleges and universities of the country for seeing young men and women. It should provide not only for physical, intellectual and ethical culture, but also for training along scientific, æsthetic and humanitarian lines, and should procure for the blind, both male and female, such superior advantages as would best fit them to share in the activities of life, to enter the liberal professions, to respond to the ordinary require-

ments of business and to discharge successfully their duties and obligations to society in whatever sphere they may be placed. It is this alone that, by equipping every individual to reach out towards his highest and largest life, will help to create the best possible types of manhood and womanhood, and thus make a long step toward approaching the ideal which Emerson portrays in the lines quoted at the head of this section. Working homes cannot do this. On the contrary, their natural tendency is to hinder rather than facilitate the attainment of such an end. Instead of being practical solvents of a perplexing problem and permanent sources of good, they are merely expedients of temporary relief, pregnant with future evils of a social and moral character. They represent a system of alimony, which, born of ignorance and reared in selfishness, is wrong in principle, vicious in practice and pernicious in its effects. Loyalty to truth, devotion to the best interests of the blind and largeness of thought alike demand that we shall prevent the erection and multiplication not of workshops pure and simple but of special abodes for "lazy yawning drones," the occupants of which will have to be maintained in sheer idleness or in sham industry, and that we shall not shrink from the penalties which are inseparable from a conscientious discharge of duty. Be the consequences what they may, we must rise superior to the vociferations of the day and help to shape the destiny of the blind in accordance with the dictates of wisdom and justice and not in obedience to the demands of weakness and cowardice.

It is obvious, from what has been said in these pages, that we owe to the blind not merely an ordinary elementary "schooling" and some kind of technical training, or the opportunity of being drilled in a

mechanical occupation and facilities to exercise it advantageously, but a rounded development of character and of their best and largest capacities,— an education which will render them strong and vigorous both physically and intellectually as well as morally, will train their senses to keenness, widen their horizon of knowledge, nurture their natural aptitudes, foster their individuality, broaden their sympathies, chasten their feelings, warm their hearts by the contemplation of noble deeds, introduce them into the ethical world and into new fields of duty, instil in them a helpful spirit and enable them to attain a wide range of mental vision and a great power of thought and of varied expression, so that they may become better prepared and more fully equipped to solve the problems of life and act nobly their part in its drama when they shall enter upon the stage of practical activity. This sort of education will be for the blind a central sun of vast illuminating power, from which they may gather light and warmth and blessing.

The ultimate ideal, toward which we are striving, is briefly this: —

I. A kindergarten and primary school, possessing a sufficient endowment and amply provided with the necessary educational facilities and the best possible influences for training the little pupils in a thoroughly rational manner and for laying a firm foundation for their physical, mental, moral, social and æsthetic development.

II. A grammar and high or preparatory school, offering a classical and an English course, complete in its departments for physical and manual training, as well as for literary, scientific and musical studies, and liberally supplied with educational appliances, apparatus and musical instruments of various kinds.

Its financial status should be such as to enable it to secure the services of a strong corps of efficient and wide-awake teachers, and its curriculum should take into account the needs, the capacity, the limitations, the tastes and the special requirements of the blind, thus making provision for a thorough cultivation and discipline of all their powers, so that our graduates may be well prepared and adequately equipped to enter any of the New-England colleges and universities, or, if they cannot afford to do this, to take their places among the active and self-relying members of society.

III. A special fund, the income to be used in conferring scholarships on deserving graduates of our institution in order to enable them to avail themselves of the superior educational advantages afforded to youth of both sexes by the best colleges, universities, conservatories of music and professional or commercial schools in New England, where, in company with those who can see, the blind may pursue their studies in any branch of knowledge, in music or in the arts, sciences or professions.

It may be well for us to consider in this connection the question whether it is right and best to found and support a separate college or university for the exclusive use of the blind, or, if it is not, where their higher education should be prosecuted.

Experience, reflection and sound philosophy all lead to the conclusion, that persons suffering under a common infirmity are liable to certain unfavorable and undesirable consequences, flowing from their abnormal condition. These are undoubtedly aggravated by the close association of the sufferers in considerable numbers and for a great length of time, while they are lessened by constant intercourse with

ordinary and normal persons. The reasons for this are obvious. The loss of sight is not merely a bodily infirmity; it affects all sides of the human organism, the intellectual and moral no less than the physical. It is the unanimous opinion of all competent and candid judges, that the blind as a class incline to one or the other of two extremes of conduct. They are either very timid, meek, hesitating and dependent, or bold, egotistical, conceited and so self-assertive as to be almost impertinent. Owing to their infirmity, which tends to shut them off from the rest of the world and to turn their thoughts inward, they are very apt to think constantly of themselves and to take wrong views of things, which dwarf their lives and hinder their possibilities of growth and success. They keep their thoughts entangled ever in the low lands of selfishness and miss the glories of the hills of self-forgetfulness and of the heavens that bend over them.

These traits and various other peculiarities of a similar nature, which ensue from the extinction of the visual sense, are intensified by the practice of removing the victims of this calamity from their homes and of gathering them together in large institutions for the purpose of teaching and training them. Great and beneficent as the advantages which our pupils derive from the present system of educating them unquestionably are, we cannot but regret most profoundly the necessity which renders it imperative for us to bring under one roof a large number of sightless children and youth, setting them apart as a separate class, and which is often fraught with consequences both evil and permanent.

The ill effects of segregating the blind from their natural associations and relationships and of congre-

gating them together during the plastic and formative period of their lives are painfully apparent in their spirit of caste and clannishness, in their morbid sensitiveness, in the awkwardness of their manners and movements, in the narrow range of their sympathies, in the extremes of undue exaggeration or unreasonable depreciation of their personal worth and capacity and in various other ways.

Now, in order that we may be able to eradicate some of the most serious of these drawbacks and to reduce to the lowest possible degree the dissemination and growth of all sorts of uncouth peculiarities and oddities, we must adhere rigidly to the cardinal principles of the minimum of association of blind persons and the maximum of their commingling with those who can see.

It is beyond question that the largest possibilities of the success of this class of our fellow-men in whatever they may undertake to do depend upon their ability to enter on the arena of the competitions of life with those whom they will naturally meet in the home, the neighborhood, the social and religious assemblies and in the world of business.

For these reasons it is of the utmost importance that, as soon as our graduates are fully prepared and thoroughly fitted for a course of higher academic and scientific instruction or of training for one of the liberal professions or for a business career, they should be scattered among the ordinary institutions of learning and not gathered again into another sort of receptacle of darkness and gloom, established for the special benefit of sightless persons, which may be known by the name of colleges and universities for them. Indeed, instead of a blessing, it would be an unmitigated misfortune for the blind to be kept by

themselves for an additional period of four or five years, apart from those of their fellow-men among whom the work of their life lies. The best and most vital interests demand that they should be placed in one of the leading colleges or best professional and commercial schools, in which every state abounds, and should be thrown with seeing young men and women. They must be put in a position to compare themselves with others of their own age and to measure accurately their ability so that they may avoid the fatal error of overestimating or underrating it. They must be brought in touch with the great forces of the world, which make progress and civilization possible, and learn something of the part that each has to play in the drama of human existence. Whether they desire to devote themselves to commercial pursuits, or to become teachers, ministers, lawyers, business men or practitioners of massage, they must be educated and taught and trained side by side with those among whom they are destined to exercise their calling or vocation, and must acquire a knowledge of the practical affairs of life and of the manners, notions and usages of society. They must come in contact with the great and moving world and hear and know more of its customs and interests and shape their own mental habits and modes of thinking and motives of action more in accordance with those of the people with whom they are to live after the completion of their education.

In no institutions of learning, which may be built and maintained solely for the benefit of a class of children and youth laboring under a common physical disability, can any of these precious, practical lessons be learned. Hence the absolute necessity for funds to provide for as many scholarships as eligible candidates for higher education may require.

In order to be able to reconstruct our system of education upon a broader and more comprehensive scale and to reform the school thoroughly, giving to it feet, limbs, trunk and head,— a completely organized body,— we need immediately the three following buildings, in addition to those which we now have in use: —

Firstly.— A music hall in the parent school at South Boston, to which should be attached a sufficient number of school rooms and a commodious gymnasium for the girls. The hall should be accessible from both departments of the establishment and should have a seating capacity for an audience of six or seven hundred people.

Secondly.— A primary building for the little girls at the kindergarten at Jamaica Plain, similar to that which has been recently erected and has been occupied by the boys during the past year.

Thirdly.— The completion of the central or school building at the kindergarten, which was planned in all its details several years ago. About one-fifth part of this was built in 1893 and has been ever since used as a hall and gymnasium for both departments.

These buildings are indispensable for the enlargement, reorganization and grading of our school, and the cost of their erection and equipment will not be far from $300,000. Besides this amount an additional fund is needed, large enough to yield no less than eight thousand dollars per annum, which sum will suffice to provide scholarships and loans for all those of our graduates who are qualified to pursue a higher course of academic, musical, scientific, professional or business education, but who have no means of their own to do so.

The treasury of the institution has not a cent

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or How should the blind be educated
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